

# Little Downham Scrapbook 1897-1990

Extracts from  
A Cambridgeshire Scrapbook  
compiled by  
Mike Petty



A compendium of cuttings relating to  
Cambridge, Ely, Huntingdon, Newmarket, Royston  
and the surrounding villages

Thousands of Fascinating Snippets of Cambridgeshire Life  
featured in my Cambridge News  
'Looking Back' columns

Published online 25 March 2015

**LT DOWNHAM ITEMS**

22 Nov 2015

[www.milepetty.org.uk](http://www.milepetty.org.uk)  
[mikepetty13a@gmail.com](mailto:mikepetty13a@gmail.com)  
01353 648106

**MIKE PETTY.**  
**Looking Back – a Cambridgeshire scrapbook 1897-1989**  
revised 2015 08 05

***Introduction***

***For the last 50 years I have helped thousands of people research Cambridge and its county.  
This index is my way of saying ‘Thank You’ for all they have taught me***

Each evening from March 1997 to April 2015 I compiled a ‘Looking Back’ column in the Cambridge News in which I featured snippets from issues of 100, 75, 50 and 25 years ago. I sought out unusual items relating to villages and areas of Cambridge not usually featured

These stories are from issues of the Cambridge Daily/Evening/Weekly News or Cambridge Independent Press between March 1897 and December 1989

There are some gaps: the years 1915-1921, 1940 to 1946 and 1965 to 1971 have yet to be scanned.

But it includes the ‘Cambridge Independent Press ‘From Our Old Files’ stories 1915-1920, 1940-45

Many entries include the date of the original story in the form YY/MM/DD - thus 33 01 29 means 29<sup>th</sup> January 1933. Other dates are those on which the article appeared in my columns. I have notes of the precise dates and pages in which the original appeared

I can supply actual copies of many of these articles and have ‘Looking Back’ compilations for a number of topics as listed below. If you would like any of these please let me know.

The newspapers are held in the Cambridgeshire Collection together with other Cambridge titles back to 1762. They have newspaper cuttings files on 750 topics from 1958 to date together with a variety of indexes including a record of stories for every village in Cambridgeshire between 1770-1900.

I initiated much of the indexing and have many indexes of my own. Please feel free to contact me for advice and assistance.

For more details of newspapers and other sources for Cambridgeshire history see my website  
[www.cambridgeshirehistory.com/MikePetty](http://www.cambridgeshirehistory.com/MikePetty)

***This index was produced as a working part of my personal research resources and would benefit by editing. If you can make any of it work for you I am delighted. But remember you should always check everything!***

***Please make what use of it you may. Please remember who it came from***

Mike Petty, 13a Reads Street, Stretham, Cambs CB6 3JT  
01353 648106  
[mikepetty13a@gmail.com](mailto:mikepetty13a@gmail.com)  
[www.mikepetty.org.uk](http://www.mikepetty.org.uk)

## Little Downham Scrapbook

Extracts from the Cambridge Daily News and other newspapers relating to Lt Downham

1899 09 21

An alarming fire took place at Quaker's farm, in the fen near Lt Downham, causing the destruction of a farmhouse and rendering the occupants homeless. Mrs Watson and her washerwoman were just preparing to partake of luncheon when smoke was seen issuing from the thatch near a chimney stack. Pails of water were brought into requisition but had little or no effect. The Fire Brigade from Ely turned up, got a plentiful supply of water from a dyke and managed to extinguish the fire. By this time only the walls and chimney stacks of the old house – built in 1803 – were left standing

1905 07 05

An accident which came within a shade of becoming a fearful disaster occurred on the main London to Norwich railway line at Lt Downham. A herd of horses were crossing in Kiln Lane when they stampeded into the line. An express train came around the curve and dashed into the animals. Four were killed outright and a fifth injured. The engine and some of the coaches passed over the carcasses of the horses but by some miracle the train kept on the metals. The bodies were removed and the train continued its journey within 20 minutes 05 07 05

1905 10 03

A gruesome discovery was made near the G.E.R. station of Black Bank, a few miles past Ely. On the railway line was found the trunk of a man's body, and some feet away the head which had evidently been severed by a passing train. The body has been identified as a publican of Little Downham who was formerly in the Militia Band at Ely. 05 10 03

1908 03 12

Dunkirk, Downham farmer sues auctioneer – 08 03 12e

1909 05 22

The unknown airship whose nocturnal wanderings in East Anglia have caused such a sensation is said to have been seen in Downham Fen eight days ago. Mr James Wilkin thought he heard the noise of a motor car but could not see one. His son said "Didn't you see it! It was an airship!" Other people in the locality observed the mysterious stranger, which is said to have gone in the direction of Littleport 09 05 22

1909 09 10

A shepherd from Oxlade, Little Downham, told the official receiver he had been in the habit of hiring grass land on the washes for the hay and also went half-shares with persons for growing potatoes. "Then in 1903 heavy floods carried a portion of my hay away and completely spoil the remainder. The same year I lost considerably by the potato blight and my occupation as a shepherd I also lost". When he started he had about £15 in cash but several creditors obtained judgements against him. Now his effects will be sold, though his wife claims certain items of furniture. CWN 09 09 10

1909 09 17

After leading an irregular life for years and having no settled place of abode, an agricultural labourer known as 'Lurcher' came to an untimely end. There were no relatives to identify the body but Aaron Hobbs from Lt Downham, who was an agricultural labourer until he had both feet cut off on the railway, said the deceased was about 32 and 'pretty good for drink at any time' who only worked when he liked. He'd been rather a 'rum' character all his life. CWN 09 09 17

1910 09 23

Painful scenes were witnessed at Little Downham during an open-air baptism in the Pit pond in Cannon Street. This is a shallow pond chiefly used for watering horses and washing carts. The Minister, who had a pair of waders reaching over the knees, was immersing a woman when her husband suddenly arrived and endeavoured to prevent the ceremony being performed. He walked into the water and great consternation prevailed among the members of the Baptist community present until he was restrained by the village policeman. Afterwards there was an angry scene as he

upbraided his wife for acting so, against his wishes. The affair was witnessed by a large crowd and still remains almost the sole topic of conversation. 10 09 23h

1911 06 06

Hopkin brothers, Little Downham dispute over will 11 06 06b

1911 06 30

The Red White and Blue Helping Hand Slade Club at Lt Downham raised funds by weekly subscriptions to render assistance to members unable to follow their employment. A man injured when working for the Littleport Drainage Commissioners said he had been incapacitated for seven weeks. After a fortnight the club refused him more sick pay and then threw him out for dinking. But the rules said the first time a claimant was intoxicated he should be fined sixpence so he took the case to court and was awarded judgement against them. 11 06 30b

1912 07 12

At an Inquest held at the Anchor Inn, Lt Downham, the Coroner said a man had threatened to 'shoot the coroner if he came on his premises.' He was very reluctant to order a post mortem since he did not want to obtrude upon the sacred sorrow of those who had suffered bereavement. But he would imprison anybody who tried to obstruct him. Two women had taken the liberty of laying the body out before the jury had viewed it. They said the doctor had told them to do it. But they must not touch a body awaiting inquest until they had an order from the coroner 12 07 12b

1912 09 20

Bankruptcy – Arthur Clarke, stationer in Trinity Street, Kirtling builder. Lt Downham smallholder - 12 09 20a

1912 11 22

Pumps of the new engine installed at Ten Mile Bank by Littleport and Downham Commissioners were started for the first time. It was 1819 when they erected their first engine here, it was of 30 hp driving a water wheel. This was replaced by an 80 hp engine in 1840 with new boilers in 1878 and bigger scoop wheels two years later. The drainage of the future would be more difficult owing to the land settling in some places and several drains would have to be diverted to avoid the hills. 12 11 22

1913 01 31

Some Lt Downham houses should be condemned as unfit for pigs, cattle or stock. Some landlords would not put their property in proper order because there were no roads leading to them whilst on the other hand people wanted to get married and could not find houses. They spent heaps of money on education but the moral character of the people was lost through living in uninhabitable houses. The same could be said of other places in the district 13 01 31 p11 CIP

1913 02 14

Lt Downham attempted suicide 13 02 14

1913 03 07

Downham labourer's death – Denston 13 03 07

1913 04 25

Ely RDC – Stretham sewer, houses Stretham & Lt Downham- 11 new houses, people wanted houses

1913 05 16

The housing situation was in a serious state, councillors were told. Some people wanted to get married, but there were no homes for them. In Wilburton there were three families living in two-roomed cottages. Some dwelling houses in Downham parish were so bad that the people suffered through living in them. But Mr Darby said that one old parishioner had suffered so much at the Hundred Foot Bank through living in a cottage having one only room down and one up, that he reached the age of 96, and his wife, who was still living, was now 94. 13 05 16 p11 CIP

1914 06 04

Downham Hospital parade 14 06 04 p11

1914 07 24

Lt Downham show & sports 14 07 24

1914 07 31

An accident occurred at Lt Downham to the wife of an old Army pensioner. Mrs Margaret Moxon, who is 60 years of age, has a wooden leg and while in her yard the leg broke and she fell, breaking her sound leg. She was taken to Addenbrooke's Hospital by motor 14 07 31

1914 11 20

Lt Downham street lighting installed to celebrate Coronation not lighted this season

1914 11 27

Ely recruiting, Littleport Constitutional Hall patriotic songs, Lt Downham

1923 05 17

At an inquiry into Ely rural council's plans for water supply the engineer said he considered there was sufficient water at Back Road, Mildenhall, to supply the needs of the Ely rural district. He said there would be two water towers, one at Littleport and one at Soham. The inspector mentioned that the water main passed through Little Downham, but that the village was not to be supplied. The engineer: They asked to be left out of the scheme. The inspector: Don't they want it? A voice emphatically: No. (laughter)

1925 06 13

Pymoor church's Diamond Jubilee was a proud day for the little village. The church and the school which adjoins it were built by Frederick Fisher in 1865 and opened and dedicated by Bishop Browne. Since that year members of the family have contributed towards the adornments of the church. A gloom was cast on their rejoicing because their old friend, Mr George Darby was leaving them after 36 years of residence and going to grace Lt Downham with his presence

1925 10 21

Little Downham parish council are hoping to brighten the main parts of their village by means of acetylene gas lamps but they want the money to do it. In expectation of support for such a project they arranged for a public meeting, but scarcely a dozen ratepayers put in an appearance. The idea is to revive a custom started in 1911 when acetylene gas was generated at the Pound, Town End and voluntary subscriptions met the financial obligations. Since the war the gas plant has been lying idle and the lampposts have served only for supports for the weary, but now it is trusted the scheme may be revived

1925 12 23

The Isle of Ely County Council claimed £37 for arrears of rent of smallholdings at Tower Farm, Lt Downham. The defendant said he had three acres of sugar beet, one acre of mangolds, two acres of brank, a fowl house with about 100 fowls, and agricultural implements. He had advertised to sell his stock but in consequence of bad trade withdrew them. He had a valuable horse for which he had been bid £70 that he had sold for £24.

1927 01 25

A Lt Downham farmer died after a serious accident at his home. He had been attending to his electric lighting plant and his clothes had caught in the large fly wheel which threw him violently to the floor where he was found unconscious. He had been a great sportsman. Those who attended Pymoor Sports could never fail to be impressed by his inspiration. He was always a "live wire" and offered a field as a playground for young

1928 12 06

A Little Downham baker told the bankruptcy court that he had bought the business for £900, but there was little trade, the weekly takings averaging £15. The majority of the business was the bread round. He took over two horses and a cart, but one horse had the colic and the other a stroke so had to be shot. He did the baking when he was able and produced about 12 stones of bread a day.

Sometimes he had no profit at all. He blamed his failure on keen competition – there were four bakers in the village, much too many for the size of the place.

1931 19 29

Mr C.B. Long of West Wrating reapplied for a bus service to the Thurlows and Cambridge. Last year it ran four days a week and carried 2,000 single and 9,000 return passengers. Now he wanted a new service from Balsham to Newmarket. Messrs Saberton and Young ran a bus from Little Downham to Ely; it had started 2½ years ago and carried 100 passengers a day. Sometimes they ran a private car to take additional passengers. 31 10 02k & l

1931 11 27

Lt Downham accident – tractor – 31 11 27d

1932 01 07

Scouting is progressing with new troops at Haddenham and Lt Downham, but the 1<sup>st</sup> Ely Troop has been disbanded owing to the inability to find a scoutmaster and four of their bugles are missing. The Littleport scoutmaster had also left and they were unable to find anyone else suitable. While the new bridge was being built at Adelaide one boy fell into the river but Scout Butcher held him up although he was gradually being pulled in himself. Without his help the other boy would have been drowned. 32 01 07

1933 01 07

sluice at Hundred Foot Bank, Downham – 33 01 07b

1934 07 11

The first air display by the recently-formed Ely Aero Club attracted 2,000 people to their flying field on the Downham Road. An attractive programme of aerobatics had been billed but was marred somewhat by the non-arrival of a number of machines. Despite this the crowd had plenty of thrills and many opportunities for joy riding. Mr H.R. Dimock was the first Ely citizen to own a private plane and his activities in the air had been watched with interest. The club hoped to have its own ground, own staff and own machines. 34 07 11

1934 09 29

Ely Council's decision to allow the swimming baths to be used on Sunday afternoons prompted strong protests. The Railway Mission deplored it, as did Downham Baptist chapel. Haddenham Baptists say it will necessitate some amount of Sunday labour, Lt Thetford think it a retrograde step and Ely Sunday School Union thought that for the sake of the children Sunday should be preserved from worldly and secular labour 34 08 29

1935 12 05

Walter Nicholas told the court he'd started as a confectioner at Little Downham. He knew nothing about the business and only took £8 a week of which thirty shillings was profit. So he added a little vegetable round, buying from neighbouring farmers. He had a motor van and later a lorry for £75, paying by instalments. As business was poor he came to Cambridge in September 1934 and started in the wholesale vegetable business, but lost more money. He disposed of his lorry for £10 and paid off some of his debts. Then he was refused a potato licence, which was a major reason for his failure. 35 12 05c

1936 01 03

Ely RDC has accepted tenders from Messrs Grensells of Kettering for wiring council houses in Ely Road and West End Sutton, Tower Road, Main Street and Cross Lane Downham, the Cambridge and Ely Roads in Stretham together with Hill Row, Hop Row and Station Road, Haddenham, Millfield Littleport and Haddenham Road at Wilburton. The Beds., Cambs. & Hunts Electricity Company will make a connection charge of £1 for each of the 94 houses– 36 01 03c

1936 07 30

The younger generation are not following in their fathers' footsteps and drinking beer, instead they are spending money on cinemas and motor cycles, the landlord of the Rose and Crown at Little Thetford claimed when appealing against his rate assessment. Mr H. Nunn of Sutton said he

employed several men in his ice-cream business but the machinery was only used six months a year while Mr G. Cobbin a miller of Downham Road Ely said he had lost trade as the beet industry had hit him heavily; he was grinding very little and the mill had not been in use for two years. 36 07 30

1936 08 18

A lorry driver and his passengers jumped for their lives in the nick of time at Main Drove level crossing near Black Bank station. The lorry, belonging to Mr E.A. Cole of The Two Pounds, Little Downham, was being used for carting hay and was on the rails when the driver noticed a train coming. He attempted to reverse, then jumped clear. The train struck the bonnet, smashing it. The radiator was torn off along with the off-side wheel and lamps. Such was the force of the impact that parts of the railway engine were broken off with one heavy metal plate found 60 yards away. 36 08 18

1937 11 05

The cost of providing and maintaining Ely fire brigade and equipment was considerable and there should be payment if they were to attend fires in the rural area, councillors heard. Only Downham, Sutton, Witcham and Haddenham had fire fighting equipment but no one would work the Haddenham engine. The whole district was now connected to a water supply so parish councils should connect to the mains and erect stand pipes. But the Cambridge brigade had offered their services without any retaining fee and that would be cheaper. 37 11 05b

1938 01 22

Death Mrs Rose Waddelow, daughter Mr Asplin, schoolmaster of Lt Downham – 38 01 22

1939 01 12

Lt Downham Football Club has been closed for a fortnight because of complaints about the conduct of spectators. The start of a match between Ely City Reserves and Little Downham Swifts was delayed by half an hour due to the non arrival of the referee and, owing to the hostile and abusive spectators who constantly encroached upon the ground and hooted the referee and Ely players, the game became a farce. The linesman, who encouraged and assisted in the disorderly conduct of the spectators, was suspended from taking part in football for the rest of the year 39 01 12f

1939 12 08

Road at Second Drove, Lt Downham to be taken over – 39 12 08

1943 06 25

Hymn Singing for War Charities —I hear (says Watchman) that Mr Fred Gibson, of Little Downham, has raised a considerable sum of money in aid of war charities by his hymn singing tours in various parts of the district. On Sunday afternoon he visited Ely and sang through the streets. His efforts met with a generous response from a large audience. In the evening he continued his tour and the afternoon's collections were considerably augmented. During the tour Red Cross Cadets and Nurses went out with collecting boxes, a total of £35 1s. 8d. being raised for Prisoners' of War Parcels Fund. Mr. Gibson expressed his appreciation for the help he received from these collectors, and for the response of the public.

1944 05 05

Street Singer. — Mr. Fred Gibson, of Little Downham, who sang in the streets of the village (Cottenham) on Sunday raised the splendid sum of £44 3s. for the Red Cross. The money was handed to Lady Brackenbury at the end of the day and was later forwarded to the Cambridge Red Cross headquarters. 44 05 05

1951 02 23

The husband of the caretaker of Lt Downham Baptist chapel who stole some coal from a station yard dump in order to heat the chapel in preparation for a funeral service found himself before the Ely magistrates. Two detective police kept observation at Black Bank station and saw him wheeling his cycle, on the front of which was a sack. He let go of the cycle, dropped the sack and ran away. The coal was for use at the chapel. The Bench granted him an absolute discharge.

1955 11 04

Tenants of council houses at Westmoor Common, Little Downham, have to look for rat holes to pour waste water in because they have no sink or drains of any description. All that was needed were a few glazed pipes as there was a septic tank. But there was no way of installing them without a comprehensive scheme which would be too expensive. Seven years ago a similar scheme was proposed at Lt Thetford but nothing had been done there either. It was wrong that there were council houses without sinks when they were spending money on modern houses. 55 11 04-a1981

1956 06 06

The pilot of a Mark 5 Vampire training jet based at R.A.F. Oakington was forced to bale out of his machine while flying over Littleport. He landed safely in Camel Road and the plane crashed at the side of a cornfield at Black Bank, Lt Downham causing a crater 15 feet deep. Norah Garner and Neville Constable ran to the wreckage and could see there was no one in it. The nose was sticking up in the air. 56 06 06a

1957 09 16

The owner of a house at 'A' Furlong Drove, Little Downham, appealed against its valuation. He had converted a drawing room to a bathroom but this did not increase the letting value because its isolated location – only his son would live there at all. But the valuation officer said a bathroom was of inestimable value in such a property – probably more so than a house in a town 57 09 16a

1959 01 23

Lt Downham new church window – 59 01 23

1959 12 04

Ely football club plans Downham Road pitch scuppered – 59 12 04d

1961 11 22

Electricity Board representatives will tour the isolated droves around Lt Downham, Pymore and Fodder Fen, Littleport seeking views on a scheme to bring electrification to the last few Fenland dwellers. Every hand shot up when the 130 people attending a meeting in Downham School were asked if they would like electricity. But the cost of bringing it to the Downham droves alone is over £50,000 61 11 22b

1962 05 16

The Littleport and Downham Drainage Commissioners first met at the Club Hotel, Ely, in 1756 and it was there they gathered for a celebration luncheon before driving five miles to Oxloade for the opening of a £65,000 all electric pumping station. Lord De Ramsey switched on two 320 hp motors capable of discharging 270 tons of water a minute. Together with two diesel-driven pumps they will serve one-third of the area they administer. Two more stations will be built near Denver Sluice and at Littleport to bring a big improvement to land that was suffering from poor drainage through the gradual wastage of the peat. 62 05 16

1962 11 01

Littleport and Downham Drainage Commissioners approved a new pumping station at Wood Fen-North Fen, Littleport - 62 11 01a

1973 01 22

Cambridgeshire farmworkers have called for a £30 minimum wage for a 40-hour week. But they turned down demands for strike action to back their claims. At present farmworkers receive a £16.20 minimum for a 42-hour week. An increase bringing it to £19.50 was due on January 22nd but was caught in the freeze and will not be paid until April. Little Downham farmworker Michael Collins said that farmworkers were living on a minimum wage. "We have got to throw down our tools and hold the country to ransom like the miners and the power workers. The country has got to wake up to the fact that we are an important industry and we want a living wage". Others pointed out that the Prime Minister himself had said that anyone earning less than £20 a week was on a starvation diet

1976 08 14



The standard of tidiness maintained by farms, shops and businesses has helped to win Little Downham the title of Cambridgeshire's best-kept village. The judges described the public playground as "an appetising kind of place". The only remark on the debit side was that some of the older houses could do with a facelift. Leighton Bromswold won the Huntingdon district title; "the joiner's shop was commendably tidy but the farmstead at one end of the village left something to be desired, even allowing for the pressure now on the farming community", they commented. Longstowe churchyard was well cared for but "the old school looked needlessly forlorn and the notice board would benefit from a touch of paint", judges felt.

1977 01 11

Molly Dancing, a special Cambridgeshire Plough Monday celebration which died out in the 1930s, has made a comeback at Balsham. The Cambridge Morris Men revived the custom as part of the ritual of taking an oak plough round the village. About £1,000 has been raised for charity since Plough Monday was revived seven years ago but for once the "Ploughmen" in breeches and waistcoats, jocularly threatening to carve up lawns unless given money, were upstaged by the enterprise of the Morris Men. Mr Russell Wortley said the costumes were as authentic and possible and the tunes were recorded from an elderly Morris dancer at Comberton who died many years ago. It was the first time they had been danced since the tradition died out at Little Downham in 1936.

1979 10 29

Rolf Harris, the radio and television star, paid a visit to Little Downham to record a radio programme; he wandered about with his tape recorder chatting to people and getting material for 'Rolf's Walkabout'. In the evening the village hall was packed for the recording. A number of local people took part and organisers described it as "a great success with a tremendous community spirit about

1980 05 23

The unveiling of a village sign will clear up an argument which has raged for years. Ancient records show that the hamlet was named Pimore but over the years it had become either Pymore or Pymoor, according to fancy. Most local people spell it 'o-o-r' but the clerk of Lt Downham Parish Council says he uses 'o-r-e' and always will do. Two signs in the village both spell it differently. But now a new wooden sign has been carved, reading 'Pymoor'. It will be unveiled at Pymore Hill. The name means 'flies over a bog' 80 05 23b

1981 01 06

Primary schools at Pymoor and Witcham may close next July; the Pymoor children will go to Lt Downham and the 35 pupils from Witcham will attend Mepal school. But Fen Drayton school may be given a temporary reprieve while councillors consider educational provision in the Fenstanton and Hilton area. 81 01 06a

1983 04 05

Mystery surrounds the cause of a plane crash at Lt Downham in which three men lost their lives. The Musketeer plane had taken off from Marshall's airport. It was seen to emerge from clouds with its right wing missing. It then broke up in mid-air before nose-diving to the ground on a farm owned by Ron Gillett. Wreckage was spread over four fields with parts buried six feet into the ground. 83 04 05 p1

1984 11 15

A medieval barn is to open as a restaurant. The 500-years-old barn at Tower Farm, Little Downham, which was built as kitchens at the Bishop of Ely's summer palace, had been used for storing straw before a blaze ripped through it. Now it has been restored to its original condition with leaded windows and timber beams. It will become a carvery restaurant and used for conferences, wedding receptions and parties 84 11 15 p7

1987 03 06

An Alliance county councillor's plans to close Milton Road public library and sell off the site for redevelopment has staggered his party colleagues. He claims the closure together with another in Lt Downham and two in Peterborough would be in accordance with plans to 'rationalise' the number of libraries. But other councillors say they will start a campaign to keep them open. 87 03 07

